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ABSTRACT

The Professional Staff Congress of the City University of New York (CUNY) presents in this document a critique of the open admissions policy at CUNY. If open admissions students were given a reasonable opportunity for collegiate success, then retention rates would lose much of their significance in evaluating the programs at the CUNY. But remediation has not been adequately administered, class size limitations have not been honored, the University's academic support program in the form of curricular research and professional training is still being developed, and the assessment of outcomes has been meager and simplistic. All that is on the public record is a misleading picture of retention that generates expectations among the students and the public. The authors conclude that CUNY has mismanaged the open admissions program and has covered up this mismanagement with misinformation. Appendices include newspaper reports, letters concerning class size and the commitment of the Congress to open admissions. (Author/PG)

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ED 089632

April 7, 1974

THE ADMINISTRATION AND EVALUATION OF OPEN ADMISSIONS AT THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

PROFESSIONAL STAFF CONGRESS/CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
25 West 43rd Street
New York, New York 10036

HE 005 334

Introduction

The Professional Staff Congress and the instructional staff we represent are deeply and wholeheartedly committed to the Open Admissions program at City University. Unlike the professions of others, however, our commitment extends beyond assuring access to every high school graduate. It extends to assuring every enrollee a reasonable opportunity of collegiate success.

The promise of this opportunity is what made our Open Admissions program unique, in theory, and attracted national attention as a genuine approach to realizing universal higher education. Other institutions have offered open enrollment for many decades. There, however, the policy was "sink or swim": if the student could not adapt to the existing college curriculum, let him drop out. At the City University, we planned to do better. The Board of Higher Education explicitly mandated that the special needs of Open Admissions students would be met and that the reasonable opportunity of collegiate success would be forthcoming.[1]

This mandate reflected the conviction of the Board, the instructional staff and the general public that access without a reasonable opportunity of collegiate success would be fraudulent to the newly admitted students.

CUNY Management

It is our belief, as we near the end of the fourth year of Open Admissions, that the Board mandate has not been adequately fulfilled by the University administration. These are our reasons:

1. Remediation, which is the key to any program of universal access, has been inadequately planned and inadequately funded. Approximately half of the freshmen entering the City University in September 1970, the first class under the Open Admissions program, were underprepared for college work, i.e. needed some remedial reading and some remedial mathematics. "Ten per cent of the students were found to need 'intensive' remedial aid in reading; 25 per cent in mathematics. In these groups were students who read at a ninth-grade level or lower, and students whose ability to handle mathematics is at or below an eighth grade level."[2] Individual faculty members and departments have struggled to meet the needs of these students, and some have achieved remarkable results. But the University administration has not adequately coordinated these efforts or the provision of adequate counseling services, the formulation of remedial courses, the adequate staffing of such courses and educationally sound limitations on the size of remedial classes.[3]

2. Class size limitations are crucial to remediation. The effectiveness of such courses depends largely on the degree to which the teacher can give the student individualized attention and instruction. The University administration acknowledged the desirability of class size ceilings in remedial courses (as well as in freshman English composition courses) in a Letter of Agreement of October 1, 1973.[4] Yet the letter

and spirit of the agreement have been widely violated and the size of remedial classes has exceeded educationally sound limits, primarily because the University administration has failed to allocate the necessary funds.[5]

3. Academic support--research and professional training--is required as the very foundation of Open Admissions. New teaching modes and new teaching materials designed for underprepared students must be developed through a concerted University-sponsored effort. We desperately need an Open Admissions support program to initiate research into teaching materials and techniques and to train incumbent and prospective teachers and counselors. We recommended such a program on June 19, 1972, but the University administration failed to act to implement this or any other program of its nature until December 12, 1973, when, because of the Professional Staff Congress initiative, a "task force" was set up to study the setting up of an Open Admissions Instructional Resource Center.[6] After almost four years, the University administration has still taken few substantive measures to give academic support to the Open Admissions instructional program.

4. Assessing the outcomes of Open Admissions is essential to planning the future direction of the program. Which curricula, pedagogical methods and counseling techniques work and which do not? Individual faculty members and groups have made some excellent qualitative evaluations of aspects of the program,[7] but the University administration has made little such effort. Instead, the University administration has consistently withheld information from the Board, the media, the public

and the instructional staff.[8] And the statistical data it has released are designed to convey the impression that Open Admissions--without adequate remediation, without limits on class size, without academic support, and without a qualitative critical assessment of the outcomes thus far--has been successful. What is more, those who reject its posture of Pollyanna are labeled by the University administration as "prophets of gloom," as if any questions about the proper instruction of Open Admissions students are hostile.

CUNY Evaluation

The latest attempt by the University administration to inform the Board and the public as to the effectiveness of the Open Admissions program is the report issued March 17, 1974, "Student Retention under Open Admissions at the City University of New York: September 1970 Enrollees Followed Through Four Semesters."[9] Its conclusion, as expressed by the University administration: "Using computer techniques for the first time to 'track' students from one CUNY college to another, the report by Professor David Lavin revealed that about seven out of ten of CUNY's first Open Admissions freshmen were still enrolled at some City University college after four semesters."[10] The report is distorted in these respects:

1. The report does not follow enrollees "through four semesters," as the document claims in its title and text. It follows enrollees through three semesters. The report falsely credits as "retained" after two years those students who registered for courses in the fourth semester but either never showed up for or never completed those courses. This distorts the time frame under study and erroneously raises the retention rates by approximately 10 per cent.

2. The report falsely purports to deal with Open Admissions students. Actually, the document deals with all students admitted to the University in September 1970. It includes 11,801 "regular" students--those with high school averages of 80 per cent and above at the senior colleges, and those of 75 per cent and above at the community colleges--all of whom would have been admitted to the University before Open Admissions.[11] Removing the "regular" students from the "cohort" further reduces the actual Open Admissions retention rates by 7 per cent.

3. Two thousand students are missing from the report and unaccounted for. The report gives the total number of freshmen admitted in September 1970 as 33,412. Both the 1972 Master Plan of the Board of Higher Education and the 1973 Open Admissions Report of the University's Office of Program and Policy Research fix the figure at 35,511.[12] Given that all previously reported retention rates are now regarded "inoperative" by a sophisticated computer, the University administration is obliged to explain the sudden disappearance of 2,099 enrollees--6 per cent of the freshman class--three and a half years after the fact.

4. The total magnitude of the quantitative distortions is impossible to establish. We estimate, however, that after removing "regular" students from the "cohort" and after allowing for fourth-semester dropouts, the retention rate of Open Admissions students after four semesters is closer to 53 per cent than the 70 per cent claimed in the report--for the students accounted for.

5. The report omits all mention of collegiate achievement. It deals only with student survival. This is a marked departure from the 1973 Open Admissions report, which devoted all of its 129 pages to collegiate achievement. That report showed, for example, that only 31 per cent of Open Admissions students had completed 36 credits with a Grade Point Average of 2.0 (the minimum average required for graduation) after three semesters.[13] The current report leaves out any such findings. It also fails to incorporate the fact that, by University policy, no students were forced to leave the University for scholastic reasons during the first two semesters, and very few were discharged for such reasons in the third semester. If dropping out is not necessarily failure, as the report contends,[14] then the converse must also be true: retention is not necessarily

success.

6. The report's unfounded conclusions perpetuate myths that discredit the Open Admissions program. One myth holds that since Open Admissions is so successful and since so many students are "making it," all those who drop out are hopeless collegiate failures, as if they had their chance and muffed it. Another myth claims that the entry and survival of large numbers of Open Admissions students must necessarily corrupt other students and overall standards, as if the quality of an elective or upper-division course is somehow diluted by the presence of a remedial course down the hall. A third myth is that you're either "for" Open Admissions or "against" it, "it" being a fixed absolute, as if the University administration's (and the public's) responsibility to its students ends as soon as they enter through the open door.[15]

Conclusions

If Open Admissions students were given a reasonable opportunity of collegiate success, then retention rates would lose much of their significance in evaluating the program and the University administration would not feel compelled to produce defensive studies.

But remediation has not been adequately administered, class size limitations have not been honored, the University's academic support program in the form of curricular research and professional training is still on the drawing boards, and the assessment of outcomes has been studiously meager and simplistic. Now all we have on the public record from the University administration is a misleading picture of retention, which generates exaggerated expectations among the students and the public.

Unsupported claims of success foster the most dangerous myth of all, that Open Admissions is being adequately managed by the University administration and adequately funded by the City and the State. If Open Admissions has been such an unquestioned success--if it was such a tremendous success with its very first class, when space, resources, staffing and counseling were underfunded by every account, including the University administration's[16]--how does that reflect on the credibility of the University administration's legitimate requests for adequate funding in the past and future?

We conclude that the University administration has mismanaged the Open Admissions program and has covered up this mismanagement with misinformation.

Notes and References

1. City University of New York, Board of Higher Education, Master Plan of the Board of Higher Education, 1969 First Revision, (CUNY, 1969), Section II, p.7: "The open admissions policy must be based upon acceptance of the fact that many under-prepared students will require time to develop the skills necessary to succeed in regular college courses. Thus, the college must devise structures which will assure that each student is given a fair chance to succeed in the program of his choice." City University of New York, Board of Higher Education, Master Plan of the Board of Higher Education, 1972 (CUNY, 1972), p.56: "The University is unalterably committed to the principle that it will offer a meaningful college experience to all of its students and avoid the 'revolving door.' Several state systems of higher education have 'open' admissions policies, but City University's program is much bolder in terms of the responsibility assumed."

2. "Half of Freshmen Found to Need Remedial Aid," The New York Times, Sept. 14, 1970; attached here as Appendix A. The study on which the newspaper account was based, like other CUNY data on Open Admissions, was not released but, according to the Times, "had been kept secret by the university." The data refers to all students who applied; the data for those students actually admitted to the University was never released, if it was ever formulated.

3. A University Task Force on Open Admissions planned to "organize," "assist," "coordinate," and "mobilize" the colleges' Open Admissions efforts, to effect the establishment of Open Admissions Policy Committees on every campus, to create a University-wide Council of College Coordinators for Open Admissions Planning, and to effect liaison between faculty, student and union groups. Very little of this has come to pass. See City University of New York, University Task Force on Open Admissions, Progress Report, Sept.25 - Dec. 5, 1969 (CUNY, 1969). See also David E. Lavin and Barbara Jacobson, Open Admissions at the City University of New York: A Description of Academic Outcomes After Three Semesters (CUNY: Office of Program and Policy Research, 1973).

4. The Letter of Agreement was negotiated by the Professional Staff Congress in contract negotiations and was executed October 1, 1973, with the signing of the collective bargaining agreement. It is attached here as Appendix B.

5. The PSC filed a grievance to this effect February 15, 1974. It is attached here as Appendix C.

We know that the Board of Higher Education shares our commitment to Open Admissions. We are therefore calling on the Board to conduct an intensive investigation into the Open Admissions policies of the City University administration.

6. The Professional Staff Congress proposal for an Open Admissions support program is attached here as Appendix D. Appendix E is the form in which it was re-submitted after negotiations, on Oct. 1, 1973.

7. See, for example, Richard M. Bossone and Max Weiner, Three Modes of Teaching Remedial English: A Comparative Analysis (Baruch College and The Graduate School of CUNY, 1973); Joe L. Rempson, "Minority Access to Higher Education in New York City (City Almanac, August 1972, pp.1-15); CCNY Alumni Association, "Open Admissions at City College of New York" (CCNY Alumni Association, January 1973).

8. Retention rates for freshmen admitted in September 1971 and 1972, which have been compiled by the University administration, have still not been released. Retention rates for those admitted in September 1970 were not released until after they were "obtained" without authorization and published in The New York Times ("Open Admissions Dropouts Double Usual City U. Rate," by M.A. Farber, Sept. 12, 1971). In the article, Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Timothy Healy is quoted as saying, "We're two months pregnant in effect, and everybody wants to know if the baby has his daddy's bald spot." Dr. Healy would have been accurate in saying that, given the nonsupport of Open Admissions by the University administration, we're not entirely pregnant.

9. David E. Lavin and Richard Silberstein, Student Retention under Open Admissions at the City University of New York: September 1970 Enrollees Followed Through Four Semesters (CUNY, Office of Program and Policy Research), February 1974.

10. In the official announcement that accompanied the report, headed "Student Retention under Open Admissions" and dated for release March 17, 1974.

11. The report also includes in its cohort 4,512 "special" students, such as those in the SEEK (Search for Education, Elevation Through Knowledge) and College Discovery programs. Why include "special" students in an Open Admissions report, after they were explicitly excluded from the previous Open Admissions report (cited above, note 3, pp. 8-9) "by design," and why include them now in such a way as to be statistically unidentifiable and inseparable from the others? SEEK and College Discovery students are economically deprived, receive greater financial, counseling, tutorial and remedial assistance than other students, and generally carry lighter course loads. At City College, SEEK funding and support yield higher retention rates than for Open Admissions students (see CCNY Alumni Association report, cited above, note 7, p.4.). But it is impossible to determine how the inclusion of all "special" students distorts the retention rates for Open Admissions students.

12. 1972 Master Plan, cited above, note 1, p. 58. 1973 Open Admissions report, cited above, note 3, p. 4.

13. Extrapolated from the 1973 Open Admissions report (cited above, note 3), pp. 20, 26, 36, and 40. This report was never released to the union or to the media.

14. P. 13, note 1.

15. All these myths have been amply articulated in the public media and journals, and the third is the invariable posture of the University administration: You're either "for" Open Admissions or "against" it. See, for example, Martin Mayer, "Higher Education for All?", Commentary, February 1973, pp. 37-47.

16. 1972 Master Plan (cited above, note 1), p. 57: "The Open Admissions program has been increasingly underfunded since its inception, with declining support for each additional student." See also City University of New York, Open Admissions at the City University of New York, Testimony Before the Joint Legislative Committee on Higher Education by the City University of New York, Nov. 17, 1971 (CUNY, 1971).

APPENDIX A

Half of Freshmen Found to Need Remedial Aid

TIMES 9/14/70

A study of tests given to about 80 per cent of the City University's entering freshmen shows that slightly more than half of those students need varying degrees of remedial aid in reading and mathematics or both, with "considerable" overlapping of need.

Several thousand of the students, according to the study, are reading below the ninth-grade level and are unable to do seventh-grade to eighth-grade mathematics.

Top administrators of the university regard the test results as a major indictment of the city's high schools and as a portent of the educational task facing the university in the years ahead.

"The high schools are a real disaster area," a senior university official asserted.

Many of the freshmen most in need of remedial assistance would have been excluded from the university, at least from its senior colleges, had it not been for the new open-admissions policy, university officials said.

The study had been kept secret by the university, although senior oficials had said that it indicated a need for remedial work by a third of the freshmen.

The university, fearing academic failure by many of its new freshmen, has planned extensive remedial and tutorial work. But the tests indicate that "the needed amount" of help, particularly in reading, may be more than had been expected.

Many students who are enrolled under the open admissions policy are expected to take more than the customary four years to earn a bachelor's degree, partly bcause some remedial courses will not carry full credit. "We're only giving college degrees for college-level work," said Dr. Seymour Hyman, deputy chancellor of the university.

Tests Given in May

The tests on which the study is based were given last May 1 to more than 28,000 high school seniors who said they were coming to the university this fall. A copy of the study has been obtained by The New York Times.

Such large-scale tests, used in making program placement decisions at the colleges, have not been conducted by the university's central office in the past. They were given last spring to determine students' academic preparedness and did not affect any applications for admission.

Other Factors Considered

University officials, who said that comparable tests were not given to high school seniors by the Board of Education, emphasized that the scores on the May 1 tests were only one factor in determining the courses a freshman would take. Other elements include high-school average, grades in particular subjects and scores on tests given directly by the individual colleges of the university.

In general, students headed for senior colleges did better on the two-hour, standardized tests than youths who are entering community colleges here.

Ten per cent of the students were found to need "intensive" remedial aid in reading; 25 per cent in mathematics. In these groups were students who read at a ninth-grade level or lower, and students whose ability to handle mathematics is at or below an eighth grade level.

About 40 per cent of the students fell into a middle range in reading, putting them at a level between the top of the ninth grade and the bottom of the 11th grade. About 25 per cent of the students scored in the middle range in mathematics—similar to an eighth-grade or ninth-grade level.

Dr. Max Weiner, director of the university's Center for the Advanced Study of Education, said that students who fell in neither the low or middle ranges on the tests were typical of the students the City University "aspired to" in the past.

He said that students who needed "intensive" reading help—the university assumed that ninth-grade reading ability was minimal for college work—would have great difficulty in overcoming their deficiencies in speed and comprehension.

Students who required "intensive" assistance in mathematics, he added, would have equal trouble, especially if they wanted to go beyond college algebra. Some of these students, he said, were probaby not equipped for such personal routines as household accounting and keeping checkbooks.

Dr. Weiner said it was particularly hard to judge the amount of remedial aid needed by students in the middle ranges on the tests. And this problem, he said, has led to varying estimates of the academic condition of the freshman class.

'We've Always Had Some'

"We've always had some of these students in the university," he observed, suggesting that "maybe one in four" students who would have scored in the middle ranges attended the university in previous years. Other officials said that 20 to 25 per cent of any class of students in the university drop out and that many of these students would have scored in the middle ranges of the May 1 tests.

Results of May 1 Tests Taken by N. Y. C. High School Seniors Accepted as Freshmen by City University

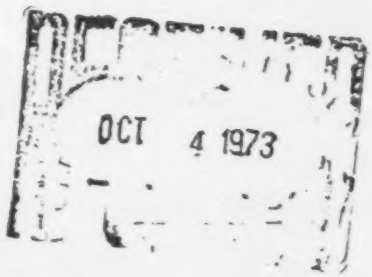
School	Number taking tests	Percent needing some* remedial reading	Percent needing some * remedial math	Percent needing intensive remedial reading	Percent needing intensive remedial math
Baruch College	1,336	44	38	3	12
Brooklyn College	3,825	24	23	2	6
City College	2,765	37	30	4	11
Hunter College	2,668	38	40	4	13
John Jay College	483	61	71	10	39
Lehman College	1,956	35	37	3	12
Queens College	2,856	21	18	1	3
Richmond College **					
York College	701	43	44	3	12
Bronx Community College	1,658	71	76	18	44
Hostos C. C.	283	82	89	33	65
Kingsborough C. C.	2,255	68	73	14	36
Manhattan C. C.	1,083	76	79	19	45
New York City C. C.	2,104	78	81	23	48
Queensborough C. C.	2,403	57	59	7	23
Staten Island C. C.	1,821	55	59	8	23
Totals	28,197 (31,634) ***	51	51	10	25

Notes: * The "some" categories include those needing intensive remedial help.
** Richmond College is an upper division college not accepting freshmen.
*** Total in parenthesis and total percentages include students who took May 1 tests, but who had not been assigned to a particular college.

Source: Based on data from City University of New York.

The New York Times — Sept. 14, 1970

APPENDIX B



The City University of New York *Office of the Chancellor*

535 East 80 Street, New York, N.Y. 10021
212 360-2121

October 1, 1973

President Belle Zeller
Professional Staff Congress/CUNY
25 West 43rd Street
New York, New York 10036

Dear President Zeller:

In the course of contract negotiations, and particularly in our discussion of your proposals for limitation of class size, you have frequently reiterated the concern of the University's Instructional Staff for the maintenance of the educational quality of the University. We know that our faculty has historically played an important role in making the academic decisions which affect class size. The University Administration has determined, however, that it shall, as a matter of general University educational policy, urge our colleges and faculty departments, to limit, as far as possible, the size of remediation classes to approximately 15 students per class and of our freshman English composition classes to approximately 25 students per class.

We are both aware that the University has contractually obligated itself not to require any member of our staff to assume an unreasonable student load.

Very truly yours,

Robert J. Kibbee

Professional Staff Congress/City University of New York

25West 43rd Street, Suite 630
New York, New York 10036
212/354-1252

APPENDIX C

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

PSCcuny

Date: February 15, 1974

To: Vice Chancellor David Newton
City University of New York
535 East 80th Street
New York, New York 10021

This is a Step 2 Grievance presented by the Professional Staff Congress:

Grievant:

Name PSC v. CUNY Tel. #_____

Address: _____

College_____ Dept._____

Grievance:

(1) Excessive enrollments in remediation classes and freshman English composition classes at Bronx Community College, City College, Staten Island Community College and others. (2) Failure of the University to allocate funds to the colleges to implement provisions cited below.

Violations:

Letter of Agreement of 10/1/73 (attached).
PSC-BHE Agreement, Articles 2 and 15.

Remedy:

(1) Increases in the number of sections to accommodate reductions in the size of classes in accordance with provisions cited above. (2) Sufficient allocation of funds to the colleges to implement Remedy (1).

Signature of PSC Representative

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

VIII. OPEN ADMISSIONS

A. The Congress and the Board reaffirm their commitment to the Open Admissions Program; recognize that this commitment extends beyond admissions to offering each student a reasonable opportunity of overcoming his scholastic handicaps and succeeding in college; and agree to improve the quality of instruction offered to freshmen admitted to the University, whatever their scholastic backgrounds, and especially the degree and quality of individualized instruction wherever necessary.

B. Consonant with the terms of this Agreement, the parties agree to take whatever measures are necessary to fulfill the University's obligations to the Open Admissions Program and to those students who are admitted under the Program, including but not limited to the following measures.

C. Toward the end of developing a permanent staff trained in and committed to the counseling and instruction of remedial and other lower division students, the University Graduate Center shall be directed to offer courses to graduate students and instructional staff members leading to a doctorate in the Skills Development and Student Development areas. Such courses are to be offered through existing academic departments such as English (for skills development in reading and writing), Library, Mathematics and Science, and shall constitute new specialized tracks within the existing doctoral programs. The courses offered by such programs, the academic credit accrued, and the doctorates awarded, shall be recognized as bona fide and desirable professional credentials for appointment to and advancement in the University's instructional staff.

D. Toward the end of developing and refining the techniques and the quality of instruction for Open Admissions and other students, the University Graduate Center shall be directed to develop an Educational Research and Development Center to develop, introduce and evaluate new testing materials, teaching materials, instructional programs and teaching techniques; to accumulate information and data about student abilities, problems, needs and their responses to the different modes of teaching; and to disseminate such information and data to the staffs of the University.

E. To expand, improve and coordinate the instructional and related services offered to remedial students, each college shall be directed to create an interdisciplinary Department of Remedial Studies, which shall participate in the recruiting, appointment, in-service training, supervision, reappointment and promotion of all staff involved in remedial instruction, within the terms of Article II of this Agreement. The Chairmen of such Departments shall become members of the University Remedial Studies Task Force, which shall coordinate the University's and the colleges' efforts in Open Admissions and shall ensure communication among the colleges and between them, the Educational Research and Development Center, and the Skills Development and Student Development Doctoral Programs, in their common objective of improving the quality of instruction under the Open Admissions Program.

Professional Staff Congress/CUNY, Contract Proposals, June 19, 1972

[See Appendix E for Revised Proposal, Oct. 1, 1973]

APPENDIX E

Professional Staff Congress/City University of New York

25West 43rd Street, Suite 620
New York, New York 10036
212/354-1252

PSCcuny

Revised 10/1/73

OPEN ADMISSIONS

A. The Congress and the Board reaffirm their commitment to the Open Admissions Program; recognize that this commitment extends beyond admissions to offering each student a reasonable opportunity of overcoming his scholastic handicaps and succeeding in college; and agree to improve the quality of instruction offered to freshmen admitted to the University, whatever their scholastic backgrounds, and especially the degree and quality of individualized instruction wherever necessary.

B. Consonant with the terms of this Agreement, the parties agree to take whatever measures are necessary to fulfill the University's obligations to the Open Admissions Program and to those students who are admitted under the Program, including but not limited to the following measures:

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2. Toward the end of developing and refining the techniques and the quality of instruction for Open Admissions and other students, the Office of the Dean for University and Special Programs of the Graduate Center shall be directed to financially support and encourage an Institute for Advanced Study in Urban Higher Education to develop, introduce and evaluate new testing materials, teaching materials, instructional programs and teaching methodologies to accumulate information and data about student abilities, problems, needs and their responses to the different modes of teaching and to disseminate such information and data to the staffs of the University.